

now quite widespread and common on pine, larch, spruce, fir etc. On this occasion, there were seven specimens actively crawling about the lime trunk. *Aphidecta obliterated* L. is another ladybird usually associated with fir trees, yet on this tree trunk there were three specimens. The other ladybird species present were *Coccinella septempunctata* L. — two specimens —, *Adalia bipunctata* L., *Thea vigintiduopunctata* L. and *Propylea quattuordecimpunctata* L. — one specimen of each.

The particular lime tree in question was one of a group of seven trees (a cherry, a hawthorn, a birch and three planes being the others) and yet was the only tree trunk to be attracting insects. Apart from the ladybirds there were a bug, a crane fly and several spiders. It was about two feet in diameter and was very much the same size as the birch and the planes. It was not particularly lichen-covered, or the most sunned. Why the lime tree should be the most attractive to these species is very intriguing. The only explanation I can offer is that the rough bark of the lime offered more crevices suitable for hibernation and concealment. — RICHARD JONES, 29 Dean Road, Willesden Green, London NW2.

A LARVAL HABITAT OF THE WHITE AND BUFF ERMINE MOTHS (*SPILOSOMA MENTHASTRI* ESP. AND *S. LUTEA* HUFN.). — The standard works are remarkably vague, and even erroneous, regarding the larval foodplants of these fairly common and conspicuous larvae. Thus for *S. menthastri*, South (*Moths of the British Isles*), writes that the caterpillars feed on low-growing plants and do not appear specially attached to any particular kind; while in the *Butterflies and Moths of Great Britain and Ireland* (ed. J. Heath), the species is stated to be polyphagous on herbaceous plants without showing particular preference! Surprisingly, though perhaps it is not a coincidence, Barrett (*Lepidoptera of the British Islands*) has only 'all sorts of low growing plants'. Similar unhelpful comments on *S. lutea* appear in all three works. The fact is, so far as S. E. England is concerned, and I suspect elsewhere in Britain, the caterpillars of both species exhibit decided preferences. I have obtained them most readily by finding walls, railings, fences, steep banks or hedges heavily festooned with certain climbing plants, especially *Clematis vitalba*, hop (*Humulus lupulus*), Virginian creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis* and *Calystegia sepium*), Russian Vine (*Fallopia aubertii*), plus elder (*Sambucus nigra*) which is often found in association with these plants. When these are shaken vigorously, the caterpillars come tumbling down, together with those of *Diataraxia oleracea* L. and *Melanchra persicariae* L. However, neither *menthastri* nor *lutea* larvae appear to be as common to-day as they were between the wars and in the immediate post-War period.

The first attempt at specifying the larval foodplants of these species seems to have been made by Chalmers-Hunt (*Lepidoptera*

of Kent), although unfortunately the records give little indication of relative preference for the plants listed. However, for *hutea*, dock is suggested as the main pabulum in Kent, and this is interesting as E. Newman (*Natural History of British Moths*) stated that the caterpillars are most readily found by examining docks on hedge banks. Barrett's observation (*op. cit.*), that *menthastri* larvae were to be found especially on weeds in gardens is interesting for Chalmers-Hunt suggests that this species seems to have a preference for urban localities. — B. K. WEST, 36 Briar Road, Bexley, Kent.

A THRIVING POPULATION OF PONTANIA CRASSIPES (THOMSON) (HYM.: TENTHREDINIDAE) IN SOUTHERN SCOTLAND. — On July 30th, 1983, I visited the highest Peeblesshire hills in order to try and confirm a remark made by Mr. A. Buckham about galls on the leaves of *Salix herbacea* L. seen on the summit of Broad Law, 840m. (NT 147 236). The only previous evidence for the presence of the one likely causative organism, the arctic-alpine *Pontania crassipes* (Thomson), in the Scottish Borders was the finding of a few old galls near plants of *S. herbacea* on White Coomb, 822m., Selkirkshire (Liston, 1983, *Entomologist's mon. Mag.* 119: 67-70). Since the hostplant was only seen on the craggy areas of White Coomb, it was to Polmood Craig (700-800m.), an extensive area of crags on the north slope of Broad Law, that I first went. About an hour's searching of the crags failed to reveal a single plant of *S. herbacea*.

Next, I tried crawling from the upper edge of the crags to the summit, looking closely at the short, sheep-grazed vegetation. At one spot I found two small plants of *S. herbacea* without any galls. Feeling rather tired on reaching the summit, I decided to start walking back to my transport at Manor Head, by the most direct route. I had descended no more than 15m. altitudinally along the north-east shoulder of the hill, when I found myself treading on an area glowing with mature, red *Pontania crassipes* galls. Many more patches of willow were found, not by looking for the plants, but because the eye was caught by the red galls, though a few remained green. The willow occurred interspersed with grass, *Empetrum* and *Vaccinium* in patches of a few square metres in area, always where the soil was very thin. About half of the leaves on all plants bore galls. The lowest altitude at which hostplant and galls were found was 780m.

Retracing my steps over Cramalt Craig (830m.) I again started to find sizeable patches of *S. herbacea* with many galls, though the willow was only on the north-facing slopes, and there were fewer plants than on Broad Law. The ridge of Dun Law (788m.), Fifescar Knowe (808m.) and Dollar Law (817m.) apparently has no *S. herbacea*.

About 300 galls were collected, from which about 220 adult *P. crassipes* emerged in January and early February 1984 after having been kept in a fridge for a few weeks then brought into a